

# Who Is the Author of Hebrews?

*One of the Mysteries of the New Testament*

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While the New Testament books are all wonderful and unique in their own way, there are a few that stand out from the rest. For example, *John* stands out from the other three gospels. *Acts* stands out as the only book that includes the history of the early church; and *Revelation* stands out as the lone book of prophecy. Then, there is *Hebrews*, written to an unknown audience by an unknown author. Let's take a minute to address these two mysteries.

## Unknown Audience

First, the book's title, *Hebrews*, was added by scholars and translators later. It is not included in the original manuscripts. Why not? There is no salutation in the book, no target audience. When we write a letter or an email, we include a salutation, a greeting, "Dear, So and So..." Immediately, we know to whom the message is written. But *Hebrews* simply opens with statements of truth, without any sort of greeting. Thus, we really don't know whom the author had in mind when he wrote it. Or do we?

Upon reading the letter, one can quickly deduce the intended audience. The author compares several Old Testament Jewish pillars to Christ (i.e., Moses, Joshua, high priests, tabernacle, covenant, sacrifices), proving that He is superior to them all. He also calls upon the witness of several Old Testament Jewish heroes of the faith to inspire faithful living and service. Thus, scholars have simply concluded that the target audience is Jews, also called Hebrews.

## Unknown Author

But who is the author? We don't know for sure. Why? Just as there is no salutation in the letter, the author does not identify himself. Today, when we write a letter or an email, we end it with our name, so that the reader knows who wrote or sent it. In the other letters of the New Testament, the writer identifies himself (*Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Jas. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1; Jude 1:1*). Not so with *Hebrews*. Therefore, a cloud of mystery hovers over this book.

But can we deduce the author's identity by other means? We can try, but we still won't know for sure. For example, early church fathers believed that Paul was the author. They came to that conclusion by piecing together several clues from the book. Here are a few.

- The author demonstrates an extensive knowledge of Jewish history and law. As a Pharisee, Paul would've been equipped with such knowledge.
- The author progresses through his arguments like a lawyer making his case. Paul demonstrates similar theological expertise in his other letters.
- The author mentions Timothy and seems to be in Rome at the time (*Heb. 13:23*), both related to Paul's ministry.
- Peter seems to verify Paul's authorship in one of his letters (*2 Pet. 3:15*).
- The letter closes with Paul's signature phrase, "Grace be with you all" (*Heb. 13:25*).

However, since Paul did not identify himself, as he does in his other letters, some doubt that Paul is the author. Also, the formal style and personality of the letter cause some to doubt that Paul is the author. Besides, the author says that he was taught by an Apostle (*Heb. 2:3*). Paul was not trained by an Apostle, but from Jesus Himself (*1 Cor. 11:23; Gal. 1:12*).

If not Paul, then who else could it be? Some have suggested Apollos (another great communicator and teacher), Barnabas, Silas, Luke, Aquila, and others. The truth is we will never know for sure. However, the book of *Hebrews* is incredible. It glorifies God, elevates Christ and His gospel, and challenges Christians to live out their faith. It's okay with me that we wait until heaven to find out who wrote it.

